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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 131021878-4158-02]

RIN 0648-XD520

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Reallocation of Pacific Cod in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; reallocation.

SUMMARY: NMFS is reallocating the projected unused amounts of Pacific cod from catcher vessels greater than 60 feet (18.3 meters) length overall (LOA) using pot gear and catcher vessels using trawl gear to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 meters) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear, American Fisheries Act (AFA) catcher/processors (C/P), Amendment 80 (A80) C/Ps, and C/Ps using pot gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area. This action is necessary to allow the 2014 total allowable catch of Pacific cod to be harvested.

DATES: Effective September 24, 2014, through 2400 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), December 31, 2014.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) according to the Fishery Management Plan for

Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (FMP) prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The 2014 Pacific cod total allowable catch (TAC) specified for catcher vessels greater than or equal to 60 feet LOA using pot gear in the BSAI is 18,976 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2014 and 2015 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (79 FR 12108, March 4, 2014). The Regional Administrator has determined that catcher vessels greater than or equal to 60 feet LOA using pot gear will not be able to harvest 3,000 mt of the remaining 2014 Pacific cod TAC allocated to those vessels under § 679.20(a)(7)(ii)(A)(5).

The 2014 Pacific cod TAC specified for catcher vessels using trawl gear in the BSAI is 48,107 mt as established by the final 2014 and 2015 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (79 FR 12108, March 4, 2014) and sector reallocation in August (79 FR 49463, August 21, 2014). The Regional Administrator has determined that catcher vessels using trawl gear will not be able to harvest 2,500 mt of the remaining 2014 Pacific cod TAC allocated to those vessels under § 679.20(a)(7)(ii)(A)(9).

Therefore, in accordance with § 679.20(a)(7)(iii)(A) and § 679.20(a)(7)(iii)(B), NMFS reallocates 5,500 mt of Pacific cod to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 meters) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear, AFA C/Ps, A80 C/Ps, and C/Ps using pot gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area.

The harvest specifications for Pacific cod included in the final 2014 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (79 FR 12108, March 4, 2014 and 79 FR 49463, August 21, 2014) are revised as follows: 15,976 mt for catcher vessels greater than or equal to 60 feet LOA using pot gear, 45,607 mt for catcher vessels using trawl gear, 12,018 mt for catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear, 5,965 mt for AFA C/Ps, 32,131 mt to A80 C/Ps, and 4,389 mt for C/Ps using pot gear.

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) as such requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent NMFS from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would delay the reallocation of Pacific cod specified from other sectors to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 meters) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear, AFA C/Ps, A80 C/Ps, and C/Ps using pot gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area. Since these fisheries are currently open, it is important to immediately inform the industry as to the revised allocations. Immediate notification is necessary to allow for the orderly conduct and efficient operation of this fishery, to allow the industry to plan for the fishing season, and to avoid potential disruption to the fishing fleet as well as processors. NMFS was unable to publish a notice

providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of September 22, 2014.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.

Dated: September 23, 2014

Emily H. Menashes,
Acting Director,
Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2014-23056 Filed 09/24/2014 at 11:15 am; Publication Date:
09/26/2014]